

ASHES OF BRONZE



AUGUSTO LA FERRE

ARS VERBI

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Credits

Ashes of Bronze

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Dedication

To those who walked after the heroes,
without a shield of their own,
without a verse to name them.
To those who buried the dead and were
forgotten before the march was over.
To those who returned changed – or never
returned at all.
To those who gather what glory lets fall.
And to that childhood of salt and silence,
where even a dead fish received a name,
as if naming could prevent complete
disappearance.
For in truth, it all begins there:
with the hand that digs before it understands
what was lost.
May this book be for those hands –
the ones that wash the blood,
close the eyes,
and draw a point in the sand.

“When the hero falls, someone
gathers the body.
And that someone also carries the
story.”

—*Ancient voice among the tents*

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Proem

Sing to me, Muse, not of Achilles – but of the
one who swept the sand after the heroes' steps.
The one who had no spear of his own, nor
verse.

Whose cuirass was borrowed, and so was his
name.

Forgotten before the crossing.

Tell me of him: the one who marched in mud
already trodden, who buried the bodies no one
claimed.

The one who did not die with glory, nor live
with wrath – but endured in between.

For even in silence there is echo.

And among the cries of war, there was a lower
sound: the smoldering noise of anguish.

Chapter I – The Silent Tent

No one spoke his name. Not out of disdain, but because it wasn't necessary.

He was one of the many. One of those who breathed when the hero refused air. One of those who waited.

The camp hung suspended. Dust settled on spears, on silent fists, on the faces of men pretending to sleep. War – this thing that made sense to kings – had turned into mud. Mud where shifts sank, orders drowned, laments of men called soldiers, though they still dreamed as sons.

He woke before the sun. Not out of discipline, but out of terror of falling asleep. He feared burning ships. Feared teeth torn out – by time, by battle – scattered in the sand. Feared hearing Achilles speak – and worse: feared not hearing him.

He wore a cuirass cracked at the ribs. The bronze no longer shone. It was as dark as the eyes of dead fish he had buried as a boy, in a gulf where salt did not kill everything. That memory came from before – before the ship, before the oath, before the march.

He remembered his brother running along the beach with a fish in his hands, laughing as if the sea were a playing field. They buried the fish together, giving them invented names, as if each scale kept a secret of the world. But he also remembered the smell: the rot clinging to his brother's hands – an odor that now, years later, was the same as the bodies he carried without names. If he had to choose one memory before the war, it would be the bent hook stuck in his own finger. Not for the pain, but because at least that wound bled for a clear reason.

Now, wounds spoke no more.

Something cracked the air – the wet snap of a spit, hurled in anger, near the tent's entrance. A gesture as worn as bronze. It was Agon, the one with loose teeth. He spent his days sharpening what no longer cut. Without looking, he said:

– Today there will be blood.

No one replied.

Dion, who had lost his thumb, adjusted the cloth that bound the stump. A dog followed his movements, perhaps waiting for scraps or for a mistake. The dog knew. It always had.

Agon spat on his own shield:

– Either he comes out, or we die with dry mouths.

A cutting stillness.

Inside, Achilles did not move.

A dove descended among the fallen shields. On one helmet, the dust formed an almost round trace – a faint circle, its center darkened with time. No one dared touch it. It was white, but carried the city's dust in its feathers.

Then came the small sound – like a tooth cracking.

He pressed the blade between his knees and began to rub the stone against the edge.

Once. Twice. Three times.

The sound was always the same. But that morning, something shifted.

The stone slipped. A cut opened on his finger. Small. Precise. Blood dripped like a thick syllable, writing a circle on the ground.

Agon looked. Said nothing. But for an instant, there was an echo.

Not an echo of bronze. An echo of fear.

The blood had already dried on his finger when the sound arrived.

It was not a shout, nor a trumpet. It was wood. Living wood, in motion. A cart creaked down the slope, dragged by two oxen too thin for the weight they bore.

Dion rose. Agon spat again, this time into the helmet. Others came. None of the great ones.

None of those with names. Only those not yet summoned by the earth.

The cart descended in silence. Without driver. Without escort.

Upon its frame, something covered in dark linen trembled in the wind. There was no smell, but dust rose as if something there had burned.

Then he saw – or thought he saw – a hand beneath the cloth. The hand was tied at the wrist. The fist turned backward.

– Is that Greek? –murmured Dion.

Agon answered without looking:

– Not Trojan.

– And if it is? – asked a young man with wide eyes. No one remembered his name.

– A Trojan doesn't arrive like this. A Trojan comes with a spear in his back, not with clean linen.

The cart halted on its own. The oxen stood motionless, as if awaiting an order that would never come.

Then the cloth fell.

It was a body. But it was wrong.

A man, yes. But without a face. Or rather: something remained where one had been. Leather pulled taut. Jaw exposed. Nose absent. Eyes sewn shut. Fingers missing. But on the chest, clean, a circle was drawn in dried blood. And at its center, a single point.

Agon stepped back. Dion fell sitting. The young man vomited. But he remained.

Not out of courage. But because the symbol seemed familiar. Not in its strokes. In its shape. As if he had dreamed it before. As if that point in the center of the flesh already knew his name.

That night, fever spread among the Myrmidons. And for the first time in days, Achilles lit a torch inside the tent.

Chapter II – Night

The moon did not rise. The sky remained still, as if the gods themselves were silent.

The Myrmidons slept by degrees – or pretended to.

Those who closed their eyes sweated. One muttered the names of ancient gods. Another bit into his shield as if it could protect him from what he dared not face.

He lay upon an oxhide. The cut on his finger throbbed. It was small. He had slept through worse pains. Through broken bones. Through fear. His body knew fatigue. But that night, it was not the body that denied him sleep.

It was the circle.

It came like mist. But not made of vapor – made of voices.

The words had no sound, yet he heard them in his stomach. They pressed against him like hunger.

Then, a figure. Not a face. But a body walking with its hands bound behind its back. Its gait was crooked. Like a warrior who had forgotten he survived.

The figure bent. With what seemed like a bone, it drew on the ground the same symbol: a circle, with a point at its center.

He tried to speak. Who are you? But his mouth did not open.

The figure raised its head. It was his face. But sewn shut.

He woke with a start.

Sweat clung to him. But it was not sweat that woke him.

It was the sound.

Inside Achilles' tent, for the first time in seven days, someone spoke.

Whispered. And what they whispered was a name.

A name he remembered leaving in the sea. But now it returned like a blunt blade lodged behind his eyes.

It was his.

– Eurynomos – said the voice.

Three times.

First like water over dry stone.

Then like a blow without cause.

At last, like a memory that refused to stay buried.

Eurynomos.

He did not move. He lay with eyes fixed on the low ceiling, where a thread of smoke curled like the finger of a bored god.

The voice persisted. Weak, but clear.

Three times.

Eurynomos.

He rose slowly. Not from fear, but because his body knew more than he did.

He left the tent.

The night was already giving way to dust.

He saw the oxen of the cart asleep on their feet.
And a hooded figure entering the hero's tent.

With it came the name.

He sat far from the fires. Where not even the dogs would go.

There, his shield rested upon its own marks –
as if it too wished to forget where it had been.

The name twisted inside him like a hook
lodged in the gut.

Eurynomos.

That was how his mother had called him while cutting onions, before Troy.

That was how his brother had shouted when losing at pebble games.

That was how the sea had swallowed the sound when he called for fish that never came.

Now the name returned. But brought no one back.

He remembered the crossing.

Not the embarkation. But the dawn when one of the ships sank.

The sea was too smooth.

A dry thunder.

A mast snapped.

A man swallowed with his mouth still full of hymn.

He had thrown a rope. The sea spat it back.

He tried to recall the names. But the wave mixed them all.

What remained was the shield.

A shield that floated. Face up. With a faded red painting.

He kept it.

It was the shield he wore.

He looked at his hand.

The dried blood still marked the point. The same as the symbol.

He wondered if those who drowned bore the same point too.

The point in the chest pulsed irregularly, like a fish caught on a hook.

A heart unsure if it was his.

If all the lost left a visible mark.

Or if there were dead swallowed so deep that even memory could not regurgitate them.

Deep down, he knew:

He carried more than his body. He carried the names that never set foot on land.

And now, his own name was calling him.

Not as salvation. But as what remained.

Chapter III – The Word that Saw

The day was born without wind. The spears did not clatter. The shields lay against the canvas, unmoving. Even the horses knew: that morning carried something. Something that had come from far, but now walked among the tents with the delicacy of a fungus: slow, inevitable, hungry.

Then he appeared.

A man with almost white eyes, covered in a tunic woven of braided hair. Wrists marked by something deeper than war-marks of chain. As if he had belonged to a place where the living do not walk upright.

He bore no weapon. No escort. Only a staff carved with ancient symbols – older than Troy, older than the gods.

Agon was the first to see him.

– A blind man – he said, spitting.

– A blind man does not walk like that – Dion replied.

– He does not walk. He seeks.

Patroclus watched from the shadows. He did not intervene. But his eyes searched for Eurynomos, as if he already knew what would come.

The man halted before the cart, still not removed. He approached the body, swollen under the sun. He knelt. Smelled the air. Touched the circle with his fingers. And licked the dried blood.

Some stepped back. Others pretended not to see.

The man turned. He pointed the staff – not at all.

At one.

– The word has been – he said, with a voice full of noise. – The name has fallen from the bone. He carries it. He must hear.

– Hear what? – asked Dion.

The man did not answer. He walked into Achilles' tent. No one stopped him.

Eurynomos felt his mouth go dry. A heat in his knees. As if the bones listened before the ears.

Dion's dog came to him. Sniffed his hand. Then his chest. And recoiled. An ancient smell. The smell of stagnant water.

Then it barked. Low. As dogs bark at the dead.

Hours later, with the shadow of the tent lengthening, Patroclus emerged.

In his eyes, a warning. In his fingers, a cloth marked with the symbol.

Without shouting, without looking at the others, he walked straight to Eurynomos.

– Come. He calls you.

Eurynomos did not reply. But his feet were already obeying.

Patroclus hesitated:

– I saw the dream as well.

Eurynomos looked at him. But did not ask.

– If he called you, it is not by choice. It is because error has found voice.

Achilles moved slightly. Patroclus faced him, firm:

– And what will you do with him? Use him as bait?

Achilles did not answer. But the silence weighed like soaked bronze.

Patroclus then turned to Eurynomos:

– You know this is a grave, do you not?

– I know – he answered. – But I was not the one who dug it.

Achilles called no one. But he had dreamed.

In the dream, according to Patroclus, the sea opened like a mouth. But it was not a common sea. It was the sea of Thetis.

From it emerged a body. With a wounded face. Eyes closed. And a point in the chest that pulsed like an inverted navel.

The man floated. And spoke a name that was not his, but that the gods repeated:

— Eurynomos.

Eurynomos merely nodded. He walked back to his tent.

He cleaned the blade.

Hermenion appeared, bringing a helmet.

— I thought it might serve.

It was old. Spiraled engravings. A prayer against shipwrecks.

– How did he die? – asked Eurynomos.

– Standing still. The shield fell. The spear came.
He did not even cry out.

– And why give this to me?

– Because I saw the dog look at you.

Eurynomos put on the helmet. It was heavy,
but it fit.

He rose.

For the first time since the sea, the body walked
before the fear.

Chapter IV – The Hero's Tent

The canvas gave way with the sound of wet skin tearing.

Inside, the air was denser. Not with incense – there was no fragrance at all – but with a kind of gravity. As if the space had swallowed too many voices and now ruminated names in silence.

The torch burned low, wedged between stones. The heat did not come from it. It came from the body still at the back of the tent.

Achilles.

He was seated. He wore no armor. No tunic of command. His bare torso revealed a firm body, but one trembling within – as if something breathed beneath the skin.

His eyes were open. But they did not see Eurynomos. They looked through him.

Patroclus held the cloth with the symbol. Behind the symbol, words curved too strangely to be read in haste.

– Sit – said Achilles. The voice was low, but firm.

Eurynomos obeyed. He sat upon a block covered in hide. The blade rested on his knees. The helmet weighed upon his neck like a dead sea.

The hero spoke:

– Thetis came.

– He changed – Patroclus had once said, upon seeing him silent before the sea.

– The sea changes everything – Achilles answered, without turning his eyes from the foam. And they had remained there, side by side, with no need for explanations. Like brothers who had already said everything in silence.

Patroclus stood, eyes to the ground.

– She showed me the sea as a tongue. And from it emerged a man. The face was yours, but turned inside out. There was a point in the chest. And in the point, a voice.

Achilles then lifted his gaze. Now he looked directly.

– It was you.

Eurynomos did not reply. Fear was not enough to silence him. It was the certainty that human words would not suffice.

– It was not I who called you – said Achilles – it was she. And not for glory. It is because of what returns.

Patroclus whispered, almost to himself:

– But it was you who answered. And that is worse.

Patroclus approached. He handed over the cloth. On its reverse, written in twisted letters:

“The bottom of the sea does not forget.”

Achilles traced a gesture in the air. A circle. Then he touched its center with his finger.

– You carry those who never arrived. And for that reason, you may go where the living do not tread.

Eurynomos closed his eyes. Not from fear. But because, for the first time, he knew: what was coming was not battle. It was passage.

Interstice – Before the Departure

He returned to his tent unseen. The others slept, or pretended to. There are silences no one dares to cross.

Inside, all was as he had left it: the hide upon the ground, the spear against the canvas, the turbid water in the pot.

He sat.

Removed the helmet. Placed it upon the shield, as if sealing a tomb. Then stripped off the cuirass. Observed the naked body.

There were no scars of glory. But there were marks: rope burns, stings of salt, the strange color of an ancient fever.

With a damp rag, he began to wash the skin. Not for hygiene, but for rite. He washed the hands as one who takes leave of what they

touched. He washed the feet as one who does not intend to return by the same path.

Outside, he heard the dog bark once. Then, nothing. And then the crickets ceased. The flies withdrew. The air thickened like the bottom of a well.

It was the hour.

He dressed slowly. The light tunic. The hidden dagger. The helmet carrying the weight of the name.

Before leaving, he took a piece of bone, thin as a hook, and drew upon the inside of the shield the symbol – but reversed. The point first. Then the circle. As if inverting the order of the world.

He left no note. No object. No prayer.

He only closed the tent's entrance and walked toward the place where the cloth had last trembled – when it revealed the body beneath it.

There was no mission. There was no map.

Only the calling. And when the body moves before the order, it is because destiny has already been cast, and the rest is noise.

Chapter V – The Place That Does Not Burn

It was between the camps. Between the straw of the Thracians and the stakes of the Boeotians. None passed there without averting their eyes. They said the gods had left that ground to itself. They said the rites offered there had never reached the right ear.

The place had no name. Only marks. Circles worn into the earth. Stones stained by ancient blood. A cracked column where a bird slept upside down.

It was there the faceless body had been left. Not by order. But because no one else wanted it anywhere else.

Eurynomos arrived before the sun. The sky was gray, without promises.

The body was no longer there. But there were things.

The cloth: still stained, stretched upon a stone as though the wind itself had laid it in reverence.

The circle: touched once more, as though another hand had remade it during the night. And in the air: a smell of something that had not burned.

He walked slowly. His feet made no sound. It was like treading upon veils. The helmet grew heavier with every step, as if it drank his memories.

He halted before the stone.

Upon it lay something new: a tooth. Small. Root still moist. Not of an animal. Nor of a child. It was of a grown man. And it had been left as though to say: the door has opened.

Eurynomos did not know what he sought. But he recognized omens.

He took the cloth. Kept the tooth. And when he touched the center of the circle with two fingers, the world changed.

The earth trembled lightly, as when a worm stirs beneath a root.

It was the same point. The same that had burned in his chest. But now, the circle around it seemed alive – like an eye opening. Not symbol. Mouth. Seal.

They said this mark came from the depths – not from a cave, but from a shell. A sign used by Thetis when she sealed those whom the sea had rejected. And for a moment too long, he understood:

it was not he who touched it. It was the symbol that touched him within.

Dion's dog, somewhere in the camp, howled.

Eurynomos sat upon the stone. Not to wait. But because he understood:

this was the beginning. And what begins in the bones does not end with words.

Chapter VI – Those Who Return

The vision came – not like a dream, but like the sea rising through his veins.

He did not close his eyes. Yet he ceased to see.

The air shifted. Grew thick. Smelled of wet rust. And when the world dissolved, she was there.

Thetis.

Her form was that of a woman bent with time, but her hands carried centuries of salt.

She did not float. She walked upon the earth as if she had invented it.

Eurynomos recognized the face. Not for having seen it before. But for having felt it when the sea spat him back.

She spoke without sound. And even so, each word struck his stomach.

– That night, when the ship sank, I saw you.

– I did not call you. But you came.

– The water did not want your name. But error has value.

She came closer. Touched his chest with her cold fingers.

– You carry those who never arrived. You are remainder. And for that, you serve.

– Tell my son: the depths do not forgive. The sea returns what pride tries to hide.

And then she vanished. Not in light. But in foam.

Eurynomos fell to his knees. Not as prayer. But as anchor.

The whale's tooth burned cold in his palm, as if foretelling the descent.

Now he knew. Thetis had chosen. Not out of love. But out of symmetry.

He had returned from the sea. And for that, he would have to descend.

Interlude – The Nameless Fish

Before the tent, before the seal, before the name returned – there was the gulf.

Eurynomos ran with his brother along the shore, their feet cutting against old shells and the rusted hooks left by the men of salt. The sun hung like a hook in the sky, and the sea was no threat – only a mouth opened for laughter.

They buried dead fish with the care of priests. Gave them names no one would ever hear.

“This one is Asterios.”

“This one, Nimbus.”

“This one, Tremor.”

And they laughed, as if war were only the invention of distant old men.

But the smell – the smell said otherwise.

The rot of fish clung to fingernails, to wrists, to tongues – the same stench that now seeped from bodies. But they did not know. Not yet.

Their mother called them.

The brother made faces.

Eurynomos pretended not to hear. He preferred to believe that by burying the fish, he saved something of the world.

– Why do we bury the fish? – asked the brother.

– So that the sea does not miss them – Eurynomos lied, hiding the fear that one day someone would do the same for them.

Now, he dug other holes.

And the names... those no longer came.

Chapter VII – Drowned Ossuary

The corridor ended without warning. Suddenly, his feet no longer found ground. Eurynomos did not fall – the ground itself had turned, swallowing him like the tongue of a god.

The light ceased. Not completely, but enough to confuse the eyes between inside and outside.

The air was dense. It smelled of wet leather, of aged iron, of something alive that had never dried.

He moved with care, hands upon the walls. They yielded. Not like stone, but like flesh steeped in brine.

Then he saw:

Bones. Many. All soaked.

First came the smell. Salt hardened. Marine rot. Leather kept for too long.

Then, the cold. Not of stone, but of bone. A thick dampness. The air reeked of rotten amber and bronze blades swallowed by the salt – the breath of those who were never mourned.

Each breath carried with it a name choked back.

They were heaped without order. Not like a burial, but like abandonment.

Skulls marked by fire. Femurs scarred by teeth. Sternums bound with rope.

At the center, an altar: made of broken spears and sundered shields. Upon it, a mask – woven from jaws tied with sinew. Rooted in its base, the same tooth he had found before – now encrusted, as though flesh itself had claimed it.

The thread on Eurynomos' wrist burned. Not with pain, but with a mute warning: You have arrived.

He walked to the altar. The ground gave beneath his feet, not enough to sink – but enough to betray.

With the whale's tooth, he pushed fragments of bone aside and opened a passage through the broken spears – as though the sea itself cleared a way for him among the dead.

He knelt. Not to pray. But because the air was too low for the living.

At the touch of the altar, he felt something tremble. Not sound. But memory.

Images pierced him: a drowned man whispering his mother's name; a shield bitten by a fish; a dog licking the spine of a faceless corpse.

At the center of the altar, a stone. Upon it, dried blood—still fresh. And below, carved into the metal of a shield:

“Those who return, do they return whole?”

Eurynomos looked at his own hands. They trembled not with fear, but with recognition.

He did not answer. There, silence had already answered long before.

He remained for a time without measure. Then he took the mask. It weighed little. But what came with it did not.

As he left, the thread on his wrist darkened further. But it no longer burned. As though to announce: Not yet.

Chapter VIII – What Should Be Below

It was not the sound that changed. It was the weight of the air.

The ossuary yielded slightly. Not in its stones – in its intent. As if something had ceased pretending not to see.

Eurynomos felt it first in his eyes. Not that he saw less – but everything seemed nearer.

The point in his chest warmed. Slowly. It did not burn. It murmured. Like a second heart learning to beat.

He was not alone.

The figure did not arrive. It was already there.

In the depths, among the heaped remains, a silhouette.

It had no face. No voice. But it had intent.

The silence around it ached.

Eurynomos did not speak. But his body trembled. Not from fear, but from recognition.

The figure moved one step. It was enough for the air to crumble.

Then a phrase arose. Not spoken. Perceived:

“He who walks with the seal... should no longer walk.”

Eurynomos pressed the mask to his chest. The thread upon his wrist had darkened until the copper had vanished.

The ground breathed. The figure waited.

For a moment without measure, war ceased. Not outside. Inside.

The figure withdrew. Without word. Without gesture. But with a gesture left undone.

Eurynomos understood: he had not only been summoned. He had been noticed. And when he

moved again, the ossuary reformed itself – like an eye closing to pretend it had not seen.

Chapter IX – Chamber of Return

The passage beyond the ossuary was no doorway. It was a fold.

The ground, once stone, became damp earth, marked by ancient footprints. A trail opened not by the living, nor by memory – but by that which must return.

Eurynomos walked slowly. Not from fear, but because the space demanded silence.

The walls darkened. But he no longer needed sight. The mask in his hands grew warm, as if it already knew the way.

The trail widened. The chamber appeared.

Circular. Deep. Clad in black stone.

At the center, an irregular mirror of water. Shapes reflected there moved before the body did.

Around it, five chairs made of vertebrae. All occupied.

Not by bodies. By faces.

Five faces suspended, without flesh, each with a hole where the mouth should have been. All turned toward him.

Eurynomos knew: they had no bodies because they had never reached the shore. Faces torn from the sea – names the depths had not returned whole.

He did not know if he stepped in or was drawn. But he was inside.

Before the water, a stone carved in the shape of a skull. Spirals etched into it, like those upon the helmet – yet older still.

It was the place for the mask.

He set it down. Not upon his face. Upon the stone.

At once, the five faces blinked together.

A voice took shape: liquid, manifold, without origin.

– You have returned.

Eurynomos remained silent. The chamber demanded no words. It demanded presence.

The voice continued:

– You were spat out, yet you return. What was not gathered, now gathers. You carry what the depths could not contain. But you do not yet know what it is. Then answer: why do you walk with the mouth marked?

Eurynomos closed his eyes.

– I do not yet carry a name. But I carry the weight.

The water stirred.

In the reflection, he saw the man from the cart. The faceless one. The one with the point upon his chest.

The reflection opened its eyes. Eurynomos did not move.

The faces inclined. In the water's surface, he saw himself reflected – not as man, but as shadow. As the faceless corpse from the cart.

– Then it is you who gathers. You who return for us. You who carry the word where the gods no longer reach.

The water darkened. In the reflection, Eurynomos saw himself not as man, but as shadow – the faceless one, the point upon his chest pulsing in rhythm with his veins.

– And if the name weighs, it is because it was spoken by one who drowned. Now it walks with you.

– And it returns.

The point in his chest grew warm. Not like fever. Like a seal.

When he raised his eyes, he was alone.

The mask was gone. But something remained:

a new name, engraved upon his tongue, and a direction.

The chamber had spoken. The mission, at last, bore weight. The point in Eurynomos' chest throbbed stronger – like a second heart, aligned with the rhythm of those who lay in the depths.

Now it was time to rise.

Interlude – The Mark that Burns

The ascent began in silence. Yet the body was no longer the same. It carried fever.

The point upon his chest burned. Not like iron. But like a sentence.

The thread upon his wrist was black. The veins nearby swollen, almost in relief.

Eurynomos staggered. Leaned against the wall.

Not to rest. But because something within had begun to press outward.

He bled from the mouth. Little. But the taste was unmistakable: salt, copper, and something deeper – like water from a poorly sealed well.

He fell to his side. His breathing faltered. The heart beat to another rhythm: slow, ritual.

Then he heard:

– “*Return with the name...*” – “*Or return as the name.*”

It was not voice. It was wall.

The pain grew. For a moment, he saw himself from outside: a body bent, filthy, exhaling heat. Nothing more. A name waiting. But the blood withdrew. The pain subsided.

Eurynomos breathed again. Slowly. Still bent. But whole – or nearly.

He remained there. He did not know how long.

The pain receded. But the echo lingered.

The heart still beat to the imposed rhythm. And only when the earth ceased to pulse beneath his skin did he understand:

The name was not yet his. But it was no longer foreign.

The mark had answered. The body had listened.

Now he could go on. But there was something less. A pause between the beats. As if part of him had remained below.

Perhaps it was only the end of pain.

Or perhaps, the beginning of the name.

Chapter X – The Salt and the Voice

The sky did not wait for him.

When he emerged from the fold, Eurynomos felt the body heavy as after fever. His legs were firm, yet the ground seemed to give way, as though the world had forgotten how to sustain one who returned from the depths.

The light did not hurt. But neither did it recognize.

Dion's dog scented him before the men saw. It stopped walking, ears erect, the hair upon its back bristling. It approached, sniffed Eurynomos' feet, licked the sand – and withdrew, tail low.

Eurynomos crossed the first tents in silence. Those who were awake looked. Some lowered their eyes. A younger soldier even made the sign of Hermes, tapping lightly upon his shield.

It was not fear. It was recognition.

Patroclus waited for him at the shore, beside an overturned boat. His hands were stained with salt, cleaning a helmet with a damp rag. Upon seeing Eurynomos, he rose.

– Is it truly you?

– It is.

– Did you return whole?

Eurynomos nodded.

– But not the same.

The dog came to them, circling, sniffing the salt as though trying to recall something ancient. It sat beside Patroclus.

– Thetis? – he asked, without prelude.

– She saw me sink. And sent me to rise.

– And Achilles?

– Still silent?

Patroclus ran a hand across his face.

– He speaks when he sleeps. Yesterday he said “*error*.” And your name before that.

Eurynomos looked at the sea. The waves came straight, without foam. None reached his feet. They broke before him.

– The point has grown – said Patroclus.

Eurynomos opened his tunic.

The seal pulsed slowly, like a second heart.

– Is it cold?

– It is alive – he answered.

He knelt. Took a handful of salt. Pressed it to his tongue. He did not swallow.

He spat upon the ground.

Then traced the symbol in the sand. He began with the point. Then a twisted spiral. Like a hook pulled too far.

– Will you fight? – Patroclus asked, without irony.

– I will gather.

– Will you bleed?

– I already bleed.

The dog whimpered, softly. And lay down.

Eurynomos rose.

– He will call you still – said Patroclus.

– I know.

He turned. The salt still upon his tongue. The seal upon his chest. The dog, now behind him, following in silence.

Eurynomos returned to the tents.

The body walked as though it already knew the path.

The point upon his chest pulsed steadily. And no longer asked anything.

Chapter XI – The Mission of Bearing

They came for him at dusk.

It was not an order. Nor a shout. Only a boy with a face stained with soot, eyes wide, a short tunic tied with a makeshift knot.

– They are calling... – he said, not quite knowing who.

– There are bodies. No one wishes to touch them.

Eurynomos rose slowly. The light tunic fell over the chest that bore the mark. He took the short blade. Bound it to his thigh with a strip of leather. The shield, still without visible sign, rested beside the folded hide.

But within, the seal was there – traced in reverse with dried blood, like a blind eye gazing outward.

He followed the boy through the tents of the rearguard.

There, the camp lay lower. The smoke of bones stung the eyes. A man coughed blood through his teeth. Another wept in his sleep. The lament did not ask for a hero. It asked for water.

They arrived at a slope where the sand was disturbed.

Three bodies.

They were not heroes. Nor known warriors. No one knew their names.

One had his face bitten – perhaps by a mule in flight. The second lay with entrails exposed, ruptured by thorn or accident. The third... only a split hoof upon what remained of a torso.

– They said it was yours to do – whispered the boy.

Eurynomos knelt.

Not in reverence. In weight.

The first body still had its mouth ajar. Eurynomos closed it with two fingers. Upon the chest, a red mark. A point. Faint, yet visible.

On the second, he wiped the eyes. On the third, he touched the hoof with the back of his hand.

The dog came. Sniffed. Pressed its muzzle against the ankles of the dead. It did not bark. It only lay down.

Eurynomos began.

There was no solemnity. But there was gesture.

He tied a rope around the ankles. A knot in the style of fire-bearers – firm, without tightening. A soldier approached with a spade. Eurynomos refused with a motion.

– I dig.

He dug.

With his hands. With the edge of the shield. With his elbow when the sand grew hard. A shallow trench, but turned toward the east.

The bodies were not placed upright.

They were laid as seed.

He covered them with worn shields. Then a thin layer of coarse salt, taken from a leather pouch tied at his waist. An ancient gesture. As though the sea, too, had its own form of lament.

Some soldiers watched from afar. None approached.

Eurynomos stood, soiled to the elbows.

The dog was still there. The boy, now silent, held a flask.

– Do you want water? – he asked.

Eurynomos drank. Rinsed his mouth. Spat.

With his fingers, he traced the seal upon the sand.

But not the circle.

Only the point.

Like seed.

Like scar.

The dog howled. Only once.

The wind shifted.

In the distance, spears already clattered. A sign.

It was the herald of the coming day.

The day of the armor.

Chapter XII – Borrowed Fire

The bronze was not his.

Yet it gleamed as though it were.

He left the tent without a word. Only the rustle of canvas stirred behind him.

The Myrmidons looked. Some with dread, others with hope. Many with knees already bent.

– He has returned – someone murmured, and the phrase spread like smoke over dying embers.

The armor of Achilles needed no name. It was enough: the broad shield upon the arm, the crest upon the helm, the firm step without hesitation.

The men knew what to do.

The chariot was brought. The charioteer handed over the reins without a word. He climbed aboard.

He gave no order. He did not shout. He only raised the spear – and it was enough.

As if all the cries restrained through so many moons were released at once, the Myrmidons answered.

The captains aligned the columns. Shields to the front. Spears arched. Elbows close. Ankles planted.

– Close the flanks! – Ajax shouted.

– Double lines! – called Menelaus, shield upon his chest.

Eurynomos stood among them. In the hot mire. The ground already sinking beneath so many feet. The seal upon his chest throbbed firm – not as threat, but as metal recalling its form.

To his right, Dion tightened his grip upon the spear with clenched teeth. To his left, Agon

chewed bitter root. The youngest of the line
prayed under his breath. But none fled.

The chariot moved.

And the army with it.

The march was an organism. The sound of feet
sinking into dry sand. The taut leather of
sandals. The shields resonating one against the
other in low harmony. Each man a part of a
single hull.

Eurynomos felt the heat of bronze against his
bare arm. Sweat at his armpits. At his waist.
The shield slid. The blood pulsed in his ears.
Yet he marched.

The Trojan wall rose ahead.

Curved shields, spears crossed, stones at their
feet. Hair bound with cords. Helmets worn.
One shouted a name that was not of god. The
others beat their spears against their own
chests, calling their dead in advance.

There was no surprise.

Only impact.

The first clash was blind. Shoulder against shield. Spear against bone. Cry against tooth.

A Trojan fell with his temple split. A Myrmidon recoiled with his arm hanging. Another leapt over a body, but was dragged back.

Eurynomos struck with the blade low. Slashed a flank. The enemy fell, hands upon the belly. A shield struck his ribs. He cried out. Held his ground. Parried with his forearm. Advanced a step. Recoiled two.

The sand turned to mud with blood.

The line broke. And was remade.

The man in the armor pressed forward. He split the ranks. His spear spun. Shields recoiled. Trojans wavered.

– Peleides! – the Myrmidons cried. – Peleides!

But Eurynomos knew.

He knew of the fold.

He knew of the error.

And still – he followed.

He saw the man advance too far. Strike with violence. Fell with precision. Challenge without pause.

He saw Ajax watch with doubt.

He saw Menelaus hesitate.

– He goes too far – Dion murmured, sweating.

– He is already beyond another line – said Agon, with his shield cracked.

Eurynomos tried to reach him.

But the field closed. Enemy shields. Cries in another tongue. A spear aimed at his throat. He lowered. Cut a knee. Dodged another. Was struck in the shoulder. Felt the blood burn.

He pressed on.

The man ahead now fought alone.

As though the body knew no limit.

Then the air darkened.

Eurynomos felt it first in his feet: the ground ceasing to tremble. Then in his chest – the seal throbbing slow, as though foretelling a wound before the blood.

He raised his eyes.

And saw.

Apollo was there.

Not as man. Nor as light. But as presence: a fold in space where spears could not touch. The god walked among them. The Trojans did not see. Nor did the Myrmidons. But Eurynomos saw.

The god did not speak. He only walked. And as he neared the man in Achilles' armor, the sound of battle diminished.

Eurynomos wished to cry out. He could not.

Patroclus faltered.

It was only a step. A moment of doubt. But it was enough.

Apollo touched his back with the palm of his hand.

The body bent slightly.

The guard fell.

Euphorbus came from the side, like a beast seizing its chance. His spear tore the flank. The shield fell at once, as though the arm had forgotten its purpose.

Still upright, he turned his body. Tried to hold his footing.

But Hector was already there.

Eurynomos saw the motion before the strike. The spear cutting the air with earthly precision.

It entered the chest.

The helm fell.

The body yielded.

Like a sail torn from the mast.

The dust rose without sound.

Eurynomos ran.

Voices seemed distant. The world slowed around him. He passed bodies, shields, a spear arcing. Not all was solid there. The field groaned beneath the gods.

He arrived in time.

Patroclus lay upon the ground. Eyes open. Blood at his lips.

The point at the corner of his mouth clear as a final prayer.

Eurynomos knelt.

Held his face in his hands.

– It is over – he said. He did not know to whom.

He closed the friend's eyes.

Covered his chest with the shield.

The dog, in the distance, howled.

And Apollo, now far, walked again through the dust.

Eurynomos followed him with his eyes. Not as accusation. But as witness.

The seal upon his chest throbbed once.

Then fell silent.

And with it, the world breathed again.

But nothing there was as before.

Chapter XIII – The Flesh Returned

The struggle endured.

Not minutes.

Hours.

The body lay among shields, and the field seemed to circle around it. Not out of pity. But because the bronze it bore had a name – and a name is worth more than flesh.

The Trojans wanted it. As proof. As trophy.

The Achaeans wanted it. As salvation.

Eurynomos did not leave its side.

Since he had covered it with the shield, he had not moved more than necessity demanded. One knee in the sand, the other raised, shoulders spent from bracing against bodies. His blade

stained. The seal upon his chest, pulsing without haste.

The blood of Patroclus spread like wine spilled upon dry linen.

– Guard the body! – Ajax cried, arms already without breath.

– He is one of us! – Menelaus roared, shield splintered.

– Bring ropes! Withdraw with him! – urged another, blood running from his ear.

But the Trojans came like waves.

First five. Then ten. Then more – pressing spears between flanks, trying to drag the flesh with hooks. One seized an ankle. Eurynomos drove his blade into his shoulder without a word. Another tried to lift the shield. Dion struck him down with his head.

The body trembled without life.

Yet the world trembled with it.

The helm of Achilles was gone. Hector had taken it. Only the body remained. And with it, revelation.

– It is not Achilles! – someone cried. – It is not him!

– It is another! – a Trojan shouted, retreating.

But it changed nothing.

Now they wanted the lie. They wanted to drag truth from the soil. They wanted to carry it back as confession or as heresy.

Eurynomos took a blow to the shoulder. The armor dented. He felt the bone cry. He did not retreat.

– Do not take him – he said, low.

The dog forced its way between spears. Bit the ankle of a Trojan. Was kicked. Returned. Growled low, circling, sniffing the fallen flesh as if to wake it.

Ajax held three at once. Menelaus gnashed his teeth. Dion staggered, blood seeping beneath his cuirass.

Eurynomos took Patroclus by the shoulders.

– Rise – he murmured. – Only as far as the tents.

The body was heavy as a soaked statue. Yet he lifted. With the help of two others, they placed him upon a broad shield, like a bier.

Hands slipped. Ropes failed. Spears were blind.

But their feet moved.

Step by step.

Retreat.

While the field collapsed, they withdrew with the flesh.

A Myrmidon fell. Another lost a hand. A third returned alone, only to guard the flank.

The dog followed.

The Trojans hesitated now. The truth of the exposed body made their steps falter.

When they crossed the edge of the field, it was already late afternoon.

Eurynomos knelt at the entrance of Achilles' tent.

He did not enter.

With soiled fingers, he traced the symbol in the sand: the point at the center, the circle around. But now, a second point appeared—like the shadow of the first.

The dog licked his hands. And withdrew.

Inside, the hero did not yet know.

But the air of the camp had changed.

Patroclus had returned.

But the seal had doubled.

And with it, so had the error.

Chapter XIV – The Trail of Bronze

1 —The Fall of the Name

Achilles was alone.

Seated before the tent. Head bowed. Shield resting against a wooden post. His eyes upon the line of the sea – though he did not see the sea.

Eurynomos watched from afar.

He knew something was coming. The seal upon his chest burned without heat, like silent fever.

Then Antilochus appeared.

He ran as one who had left fire burning behind him.

– Peleides! – he shouted from afar. – I must speak with you. But first... hold yourself.

Achilles lifted his eyes.

He did not speak.

– The son of Menoetius... Patroclus... has fallen
– Antilochus said. His voice broke. – He...
Hector killed him.

The body is still upon the field.

Achilles did not answer. Not at once.

Then, as though something cracked within, he
fell to his knees.

With his hands he grasped the dust around the
tent. Cast it upon his head. Upon his face.
Upon his shoulders. The dust clung to the
sweat. Ran in streams.

He cried out.

And the cry was not of man.

It was of beast wounded.

Eurynomos heard.

The Myrmidons heard.

Even those who knew nothing, knew at that instant.

Achilles fell to the ground. Beat his chest against the earth. Tore his hair. His tunic.

– I said it was only to frighten them... – he murmured. – That he would return.

– He will not return – Antilochus said, his voice low.

– I should have died with him.

Eurynomos stood still. The seal pulsed as though remembering.

From the depths of the sea, something answered.

Not sound. But vibration.

Thetis had heard.

The world shifted.

2 — *The Fury of Achilles*

The body of Achilles did not move.

He lay face down. Tunic torn. Skin covered in earth. Only his shoulders trembled.

The Myrmidons around him waited for the sound to cease. But it did not cease. It was a weeping without rhythm. Without control. An animal at the bone of its own son.

Eurynomos remained still.

From where he watched, he felt the seal vibrate more strongly than his heart. The field had stopped. No wind. No fly. No word.

Then came the water.

Not as wave. But as mist.

The ground grew damp.

And Thetis appeared.

She came from the sea without haste, barefoot,
face covered. Her hair still dripping. And where
she walked, the earth seemed to sink.

None saw her. Only Eurynomos.

He recognized not the body, but the gesture:
the same he had seen beneath the earth, when
the symbol had been given him.

Thetis knelt beside her son.

She touched his back.

Achilles did not rise. But his body ceased to
tremble.

– I heard – she said. – From where sound does
not reach.

– He died for me – Achilles murmured. – With
my name. With my skin.

– Then honor him.

– Vengeance? – he asked, lifting his head.

– Fire – Thetis said. – And then silence.

Achilles turned his face. His eyes were white with salt and dust.

– Then I too shall die.

– Yes.

– Do you know this?

– Since before you were born.

The silence that followed lasted longer than need.

Thetis placed something upon the sand: a strip of fine cloth, a seal traced with shells – like an invitation from the ancient sea.

– Wait here. Hephaestus will make you another armor.

– I need no armor – Achilles answered. – I need his body.

– You shall have both.

And she vanished.

The ground dried.

The air grew heavy again.

Eurynomos closed his eyes. He saw the shadow of Hephaestus kindling a forge where there was no matter. He felt the seal upon his chest respond with strange heat – as though he himself were the mold.

In the tent, Achilles had not yet risen.

But all knew.

The fury was standing.

Even if the body lay still.

3 —The Combat

At dawn, she returned.

Thetis.

She appeared where the dew had not yet touched. In her arms she bore something wrapped in black cloth. And where she walked, not even dust rose.

The Myrmidons did not see her. But they knew.

Eurynomos, at the door of the tent, recognized the sound of metal before he saw it.

The goddess passed him without a glance. Entered.

Within, Achilles sat. He no longer wept. But neither did he eat. His hands upon his knees. His eyes open.

She set the burden before him.

Achilles opened the cloth.

First the helm. Then the shield. At last, the cuirass.

Forged by Hephaestus.

Eurynomos saw the reflection of the shield upon the sand. Upon it, the entire world danced: cities in joy and in ruin, fields of harvest, rivers, children, judges, oxen, corpses, stars.

When Achilles donned the armor, the field fell silent.

Men came from afar to behold him.

None spoke.

Nor needed to.

The Achaean assembly was convened soon after.

There stood the captains, the elders, those who still remembered Tyndareus and Odysseus before the war. Agamemnon, standing, brought gifts. He brought Briseis. He brought gold, iron, leather, words.

Achilles accepted.

Not for honor.

But because the gesture had to be complete.

– There is no time for feasts – he said. –
Patroclus still lies.

– And you remain impure – said Calchas, the
priest.

Then Achilles allowed the rite.

The blood of the boar, the words of cleansing,
the water upon his face, the salt upon his skin.
Eurynomos watched from afar. He knew the
rite was only mark—like the point he himself
bore. But all war requires symbol before steel.

Odysseus spoke for the living.

– Let them eat. Let them be strong. Let them
sleep an hour at least.

But Achilles refused.

– Let them eat. I only fight.

By late morning, the horses were brought.

Xanthus and Balius.

Immortal steeds, given by Zeus. They neighed
as if they already knew what was to come.

Achilles touched them.

And Xanthus spoke.

— Even today we shall carry you to death,
Peleides. But not by our will.

Achilles smiled.

— I know.

Eurynomos followed him to the edge of the
field.

The dog came in silence.

The shield shone so bright it darkened the eyes
of those who looked upon it.

The seal upon Eurynomos' chest burned once.

It was the world warning: now there is no error.

Now there is execution.

And the field, for the first time since the death of Patroclus, moved.

4 —*The Remains of Hector*

Achilles crossed the field like fever burning bone.

The sun trembled upon the plates of his new armor. And men — Greek, Trojan, living — dared not speak. Even the wind was still.

Eurynomos followed behind. Not as soldier. Not as shadow. But as bearer of the seal of what must be seen.

The dog walked at his side, sniffing traces not yet made.

At Troy's wall, Hector waited.

Alone.

Bronze weighed upon his shoulder. His mouth dry. But his eyes were fixed. Not upon the enemy—but upon the gesture he must make.

From above, Priam cried:

– Return, son! Do not give your name to the dust!

And Hecuba:

– Come back to the womb that bore you! Do not let me die before I bury you!

But Hector did not reply.

The new shield of Achilles rose on the horizon like a forged sun. Each step traced a line the whole world could see. The sound of his sandals was the tearing of ancient leather – the noise the dead make before they are named.

Hector faltered.

And ran.

Three times they circled the city.

Eurynomos did not run.

But he felt in his chest each turn. The seal
burned. His body sweated. His legs ached – as
if he too were fleeing. Or pursuing.

On the fourth turn, something shifted.

The air cracked. And he saw her.

Athena.

She had taken the form of Deïphobus. But her
eyes shone like wet blades.

– Stop, brother – she said to Hector. – I am
with you.

Eurynomos knew.

He knew before the spear was cast.

Hector stopped.

Turned.

Drew breath as one who plunges.

– Come, Peleides. But bury me.

Achilles did not reply.

The spear flew.

It missed.

Hector cast his own – and missed as well.

Their eyes were moist, not from fear. From memory.

Achilles drew another spear.

And this time, it struck.

At the curve of the neck.

At the only gap.

At the only chance.

The body of Hector fell without sound.

But the earth groaned.

Eurynomos felt his entrails tighten. He wished to advance. But he remained.

He saw the blood flow. Saw Hector spit – and still speak:

– Your death will come, Peleides. And it will come soon. No mother, no sea, no seal will save you.

Achilles approached.

He looked upon the face.

He spat.

– We all shall die. But you will be dragged.

And he bound the ankles with double straps.

He dragged the body as one tears out a root.

The corpse slid through the dust like dead fish.

Eurynomos walked to the furrow.

He said nothing.

But knelt.

Ran his fingers along the mark left by the heel.

And felt: it was name. It was word. It was sentence.

The dog licked the sand.

And there, in the trail of the fallen, the same symbol emerged:

point

point

point

The field burned.

But that trace was cold.

Eurynomos understood:

no hero fails to become line.

And no line fails to be sought by the sea.

Chapter XV – Nameless Sand

The field slept. But the body did not.

It was there – before the tent of Achilles. Cast like hunted beast, like burden without name. Hector. Son of a king. Dragged to the end of dust.

Blood had dried upon his back. Ribs lay exposed. One foot still bore a fragment of strap. The face... what was left of it.

Eurynomos watched from afar.

Not because he wished.

But because the seal upon his chest did not allow him to lie down.

It was deep night. No cry. No fever. Only the scent of dead bronze and dust.

The dog sat beside him, restless. Sniffing the wind. Weeping without sound.

Then the seal pulsed.

Not as wound. As magnet.

Eurynomos walked.

He passed between the tents with steps that did not ache. It was not sleep. It was fate.

He reached the body.

He knelt.

Not to pray. But because the body required to be seen.

He placed his hand upon Hector's chest.

There was still a point.

Almost faded. But there.

Eurynomos bowed his head. As though listening.

Then he cleaned the face. Or what remained.
Brushed the sand from the eyes. Set the arms in
place. Covered the feet.

– Now – he said. – None shall drag you further.

The dog lay down. As guardian.

Eurynomos remained until the sky brightened.

When the sun touched the body, he rose.

He said nothing.

But something new weighed upon his
shoulders.

Something he himself could not yet name.

The next day, battle.

Wounded bodies. Cries that did not ask for
rescue. Dust as shroud.

Eurynomos fought.

But others now saw him differently.

When he passed, they fell silent.

When he touched the dead, none dared interrupt.

The shields no longer marked him. The dog followed. And the wounded called him otherwise.

Not Myrmidon.

Not man.

Only the one who gathers.

In the next battle, Eurynomos dragged the body of a Trojan whose face no longer existed. The gods beheld.

In the next, he gathered the body of a Greek whose name was forgotten. The gods looked.

In another, he touched a corpse still warm. The seal shone.

And a god – Ares – turned his eyes away.

After that, something changed.

No one gave him orders.

Yet he was in every field.

The shadow that covers the eyes of those who fall.

The final gesture before the sand.

One night, Thetis dreamed of him. And woke with salt in her eyes – not of sea, but of omen.

Another time, Athena saw him. And kept silent – uncertain if from fear, or from reverence.

Hermes passed. Spoke nothing. But when he crossed him, he stepped as one steps upon ground too ancient. And for an instant, even the air seemed to listen.

After that, even silence walked differently.

Eurynomos was still soldier.

But when he walked, the dust parted.

And the dogs ceased.

And the dead no longer groaned.

For they knew: there walked the one who gathers even the names the gods will not pronounce.

And one day, no one remembered if he had been born.

Only that he walked. Always.

And the gods, upon seeing him, lowered their eyes, but without knowing why.

Epilogue

Do not invoke the Muse. She would not hear.

The gods looked – and did not know why.

The one who gathered the names now walks in silence, between the embers of the field and the salt of the depths.

No lyre followed him. No glory called him. But when the dust settles and the bronze falls silent, a shadow bends, closes the eyes of the dead, and seals forgetting.

And when the gods are at last summoned to sleep – it will be he who comes to gather them. Not to punish. Nor to praise. Only to close the circle, and in the point, let the name rest.

Biographical Note

Augusto La Fere (Lapa, Paraná, 1973) is an author and essayist. His work navigates the realms of philosophy, memory, and landscape, exploring the tension between silence and language. He is the founder of the *Ars Verbi*™ imprint, through which he publishes both print and digital editions of works under free licenses.

His published works include *The Vineyards of Belaste*, *The Legacy*, *Clown*, *Letters to No One*, *High Silence*, and *Before They Tear Down*. He lives and works in his hometown of Lapa, Paraná, where he is also involved in cultural initiatives dedicated to promoting free literature.

Colophon

This digital edition of **Ashes of Bronze** was composed in EB Garamond, a typographic project by Georg Duffner (2008), inspired by the Renaissance Garamond cut by Claude Garamond (c. 1480–1561) in Paris. Like Eurynomos, who bore the names erased by war, this book is a gesture for those who remain between glory and forgetting. The point upon the chest—mark of those who return — is also the seal of literature: to dig in the sand, to name what the sea has returned, and to close the circle.

This edition is a point drawn upon the sand.
The rest, the sea knows.

—
The point has been drawn.
The name, gathered.

